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ABSTRACT

The Career Opportunities Program (COP) is a nationwide program established under the Education Professions Development Act of 1967 to train and employ low-income community residents and Vietnam-era veterans as educational auxiliaries for poverty area schools. Indiana University at South Bend (IUSB), in cooperation with the South Bend Community School Corporation, has operated a COP Project since 1970. During the first semester, COP students are enrolled at IUSB and are assigned to Model Cities and Title I schools and Head Start centers. The 2-year COP curriculum is designed to provide students with a broad knowledge of the public school curriculum and the students in elementary-level Title I schools. Support services rendered to COP students include: (a) vocational, personal, and educational counseling; (b) child care services; (c) tutorial services; and (d) referrals to health and welfare agencies for support beyond the resources of IUSB. Graduates of the program are awarded the Associate of Science Degree in educational technology. (HMD)

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CAREER OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM:

A DESCRIPTION AND CASE STUDY

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Career Opportunities is a nation-wide program established under the Education Professions Development Act of 1967 (EPDA). Throughout the country low-income community residents and Vietnam era veterans, who have an interest in the field of education, are being given an opportunity to explore and test their interests, abilities, and personal characteristics with regard to specific occupational goals. They are employed as educational auxiliaries in poverty area schools or other education-related centers for on-the-job training while enrolled in colleges or universities. There are more than 130 Career Opportunities Program projects operated by school systems and institutions of higher education in the 50 states and Puerto Rico (2).

The Career Opportunities Program (COP) is an innovation in the field of education, which represents "career education in action." This approach to educational personnel development differs greatly from the traditional method of teacher training. It gives the schools a new source of people and a new approach to the training and selection of teachers. Morrill, Oetting, and Hurst (1974) contend that paraprofessionals can be selected and trained to work in a variety of settings and that employment of paraprofessionals has definite advantages. The work force is increased and paraprofessionals are often able to work with certain groups more effectively than are professionals (5).

Two COP projects are located in Indiana, one in Gary and the other in South Bend. The South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) and the Educational Technology Program of Indiana University at South Bend (IUSB) represent a partnership in "career education in action" in South Bend, Indiana. The SBCSC is the prime contractor and IUSB is the institution of higher education for the local project. This project is funded by the Office of Education of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

The office of the director of COP is located at the SBCSC Educational Center, 635 South Main Street, South Bend, Indiana. The university coordinator and the COP counselor have their offices in Greenlawn Hall of IUSB, 1825 Northside Boulevard, South Bend, Indiana. The director is a former principal of an elementary Title I school, which was located in the Model Cities area. The university coordinator is an assistant professor of education at IUSB. The director, the university coordinator, and the counselor represent the professional staff of the South Bend COP.

South Bend, Indiana is one of the cities of the United States with a high concentration of low-income and otherwise disadvantaged residents. As a result, a large section of the city was designated as a Model Cities neighborhood. In addition, other parts of South Bend have especially large populations of children of economically deprived families. Nineteen elementary

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schools in the city have been designated eligible for Title I funds for disadvantaged children. These schools are both public and parochial.

An outstanding characteristic of these neighborhoods is that approximately 40 per cent of the population has not progressed beyond the eighth grade, and that about two-thirds has not completed high school. Another distinguishing trait of these lower socio-economic sections of the inner city is that their populations are predominately black. Failure of t educational services in the poverty sections of the city emphasized the need for more effective relationships between the schools and the community in order to make education more directly responsive to the needs of the people. High unemployment rates and heavy welfare loads gave evidence of the need for career development opportunities.

In order to provide the maximum input in developing new models for using and training this new source of people in the schools, community involvement was perceived to be of utmost importance. The South Bend COP, therefore, started its program by a linkage with other educational and community organizations and agencies. These linkages have been with Model Cities, the Community Action Program, Head Start, Title I, the Urban League, and other specialized community agencies of the United Way of St. Joseph County. Administrative costs are paid by COP and the salaries and stipends by the cooperating agencies.

The guidelines of COP require that each project establish and maintain a COP advisory council and that this council has the responsibility for recruitment and selection of COP participants. The candidates selected by the COP advisory council are presented to the local COP director and the university coordinator for school and university agreement (3). The following community organizations and agencies are represented on the COP advisory council: South Bend Federation of Teachers, the Community Education Association, Upward Bound Program of the University of Notre Dame, the Urban League of South Bend and St. Joseph County, Inc., the Youth Advocacy Program, St. Stephen Center, Indiana Vocational Technical College, the Community Action Program, Model Cities, Title I, Head Start Project, Project Step, and Hansel Center. Project Step is the South Bend Neighborhood Youth Corp (NYC) and Hansel Center is an affiliate of the United Way of St. Joseph County, Inc. The COP director, university coordinator, and other administrative personnel of SBCSC and IUSB serve as consultants.

Public announcement was made of the program. Recruitment and selection were conducted during the spring and summer of 1970. Individuals applied and referrals were made to the COP director and the chairman of the COP advisory council. Referrals came from COP linkages, organizations and agencies represented on the COP advisory council, and the Employment Security Division. Each person who made application was screened by a staff member of the Employment Security Division. Eligibility was and has continued to be contingent upon the applicant's ability to meet the low-income and residence requirements of the national COP guidelines. All applications were reviewed by representatives of the COP advisory council. Persons whose applications met the requirements of the COP guidelines and were considered to have potential for the COP training were invited for personal interviews.

Applicants selected by the COP advisory council were referred to the COP director and the university coordinator for final acceptance. The majority of

the applicants who met the COP guidelines were of the black race. This was observed to be because the racial composition of the target neighborhoods and the patterns of segregation and discrimination which exist for poor members of minority groups.

Forty low-income community residents were selected for the South Bend COP, which started with a two week orientation program in August 1970. Most of the trainees had high school diplomas or the equivalent, but some did not. Many of those who had completed high school had been out of school for several years. Many were among the under-educated, under-employed, unemployed, and/or otherwise disadvantaged. COP, however, encourages high-risk participants; therefore, they were accepted. The COP trainee was assigned to a regular classroom teacher as a teacher aide. From the beginning, classroom teachers, resource teachers, principals, and university personnel attended and participated in this pre-service training program.

During the first semester of the 1970-71 academic year these COP participants were assigned to three Model Cities schools, four Title I schools, and six Head Start centers. They were also enrolled at IUSB. The curriculum for the COP students during the first two years was designed to provide a broad knowledge of the public school curriculum and students in the elementary level Title I schools. Sixty-two credit hours of COP core courses were offered during the 1970-71 school year, the 1971 summer session, and the 1971-72 academic year (4).

The COP teacher aide and the regular teacher working as a team has made it possible for the local educational system to devise better ways of utilizing and training school staff (both professional and paraprofessional). These COP educational auxiliaries have been able to assist both teachers and administrators to improve the learning of children from low-income families. The COP paraprofessionals are residents of the community where the target area schools are located; therefore, they have been able to add positive home-school relationships. They serve or have served in one middle school, junior high schools, public elementary schools, a Catholic elementary Title I school, Head Start centers, rehabilitation centers, day care centers, and the Street Academy of the Urban League.

Thirty COP participants were awarded the associate of science degree in educational technology on May 17, 1972, during the commencement of Indiana University at South Bend. Eight received this degree during 1973. Twenty-two of these have remained in the program and have as their goal the bachelor of science degree in elementary, secondary, or special education. One COP participant completed the requirements for the bachelor of science in special education in December, 1973 and was hired immediately as a special education teacher by the South Bend Community School Corporation. Nine other COP enrollees are on the tentative list for graduation and teacher certification in 1974.

An "honors program" is held each year on the campus of Indiana University at South Bend. Awards are presented to students who have been considered as excellent in their academic field by the chairman and/or other significant faculty members of the various divisions of the university. An award for "excellent in educational technology" was presented to two COP students on April 9, 1972. Another COP participant received this award April 15, 1973, and

another on April 7, 1974. In addition the names of 21 COP students of IUSB have appeared on the "honors list" at least once during the "annual honors programs" of 1972, 1973, or 1974. Eleven have been listed twice. This "honors list" includes students who achieved a 3.3 grade-point average or higher while enrolled in twelve or more semester hours during the first or second semester of an academic year. The academic achievement of COP participants is exceptionally significant when one considers low-income and area residence requirements of COP's entrance requirements.

In addition to on-the-job training in the schools or other educational centers of the inner city and their enrollment in the classes at the University, each COP participant has experienced a continuous in-service training program. Both Head Start and Title I have regular training sessions and from time to time periodic training conducted by the staff of COP.

The age range for COP participants has been 16 to 56 years. The majority of them have been females who have from two to nine children. Child care facilties for the children of the COP participants has been considered a problem since the inception of the program. Contacts to explore the possibility to expand the child care services in the community began in October of 1970 and have been continued by the director, university coordinator, and the COP counselor. The original efforts were not very successful, therefore, it was necessary for the COP at IUSB to establish a free child care center on the campus of IUSB during the summer of 1971. Seven Project Step (NYC) students served as child care attendants under the supervision of an adult advisor.

The COP at IUSB has provided personal, vocational, and educational counseling as needed for the participants since its inception. The COP staff works closely with the Special Services Program of IUSB, which is designed to assist disadvantaged and handicapped students. Tutorial services for COP students, who have experienced difficulties in the academic phase of the program, have been provided by referrals to Special Services or the Writing Clinic at IUSB. The Director of Financial Aids at IUSB has interacted with the COP trainees during the pre-training or in-service training sessions. He discussed the financial aid programs of Indiana University. COP participants have also been referred to this finance officer for assistance or information.

The counseling services also include referrals to other health or welfare agencies for supportive services beyond the resources at IUSB. Referrals have been made to the Family and Children's Center for home-maker service, temporary financial assistance, or marital counseling. The home-maker service was provided for at least three COP participants, who had illness in their families or temporary child care problems. These conditions would have made it impossible for them to be at their work stations or able to attend their classes at the university. Temporary financial aid, marital counseling, or casework services was provided for a few others. Contacts and referrals were made for two COP enrolles, who received testing and rehabilitation training at the Hearing and Speech Center of St. Joseph County, Inc. Two COP trainees have been referred to Vocational Rehabilitation-State Department of Public Instruction. One was given financial assistance for the services of an eye specialist. The other received financial assistance for a new prosthesis; she has sustained the loss of her right arm.

The COP participants who had neither received a high school diploma nor the equivalency certificate were referred to the Learning Center of the Adult Education Division of the SBCSC. They attended classes in basic education as

preparation for the equivalency certificate. Three COP participants completed the General Educational Development Tests during their tenure in COP. One of these is now a senior at IUSB and is expected to complete the requirements for the bachelor of science in special education by December, 1974.

There have been terminations and additions since the inception of the program at IUSB. Some reasons for withdrawals have been illness of the trainee or a member of the trainee's family, loss of interest in the training program, inability to achieve at IUSB or to adjust to the job assignment, entering another type of training or employment, or social or economic factors beyond the trainee's or COP's control.

An effort to follow-up those who have left the program has revealed that some are employed as paraprofessionals in Head Start, day-care centers, and the South Bend Community School Corporation. One is a policewoman and another former female participant is a security guard at the St. Joseph County Airport. Two others have entered training under the Work Incentive Program (WIN). Two are enrolled in other divisions of the university at IUSB. Two former male COP students who completed training under the Manpower Development and Training Act are employed as skilled workers in industry. One young Mexican-American woman is employed as a liaison person between the South Bend Community School Corporation and the Mexican-American community.

Since the first summer session of 1972, COP students have been enrolled in regular college courses at IUSB. The COP core courses, in which the original participants were enrolled during the first two years, have been evaluated and determined equivalent to regular IUSB courses required by the Division of Education (1).

As terminations have occurred, other participants have been enrolled. They too were screened by representatives of the advisory council and were also required to meet the low-income and residence requirements of the national guidelines of COP. At this time there are 49 COP participants who have on-the-job training assignments at 10 South Bend public schools, 11 Head Start centers, three day-care centers, the Street Academy of Urban League, and IUSB. Of the 49 who are currently enrolled in the program, 44 are females. Thirty-five of these are black, eight are white, and one is Mexican-American. The five males are black; four of them are Vietnam era veterans.

A career lattice was established from the outset for COP participants who were on the payroll of the SBCSC, Title I, or Head Start. These trainees have received automatic wage increases and fringe benefits as they progressed through the various steps of this career lattice. Their advancement is based upon an assessment of their competence, the tenure of their work training assignment, and academic achievement at the University. Other trainees who are employed as educational auxiliaries with other community agencies also receive periodic wage increases based upon the personnel policies of the respective agencies.

The field-based phase of the Career Opportunities Program enables the participants to gain extensive training and varied work experiences as the member of the paraprofessional-professional teacher team. As the length of the job experience increases and the educational training advances, the COP participant takes on greater responsibilities. Participation in COP has

enabled motivated low-income community residents who have appropriate interest, abilities, and personal characteristics to secure vocational and educational training toward their occupational goals. The selection, training methods, and the career lattice feature of the program give evidence that the Career Opportunities Program is truly "career education in action."

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